

NJS Presents**Teaching NJ History****In this Issue:*****Teaching Thomas Edison Using Primary Sources*****By Steve Santucci with Jonathan Dowler****DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14713/njs.v5i1.182>**

In this edition of “Teaching NJ History,” West Morris Mendham High School History Teacher Steve Santucci shares information to assist educators who wish to teach Thomas Edison using primary sources. Mr. Santucci has presented on teaching with primary sources at several conferences over the past few years, most recently at the 2018 NJ History Forum at Monmouth University, “Greetings from New Jersey: Popular Culture and the Garden State.” There, he presented on Edison with fellow West Morris Mendham teacher Jonathan Dowler.

Primary sources are no doubt powerful teaching tools, for any topic; but students definitely require scaffolding when using them. Encourage them to remember the H.I.P.P.O. when evaluating material from the past: they should be able to identify the **H**istorical Context; the **I**ntended Audience; the **P**oint of View; and the **P**urpose; and they should also be able to articulate an **O**verview of the source.



Edison and Pop Culture: Primary Documents

Hello! Santy!! Cartoon by Albert Reid, courtesy of the Kansas Historical Society.

In this humorous cartoon, Reid depicts the cultural icon Santa Claus as he is about to fill a stocking with gifts. Santa is shocked and alarmed when the newfangled phonograph blurts out a recording of the child's Christmas wish list.

<http://www.phonographia.com/Phonotoons.htm>

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Pioneers

February 9th, 1927.

Mr. Wm H. Meadowcroft,
Historian-Edison Pioneers.,
Edison Laboratory,
Orange, N.J.

My dear Mr. Meadowcroft:

Attached, you will find a clipping taken from the Newark, (N.J.) Evening News of February 8th, concerning the matter of observing the date of February 11th, as a national holiday and as being the true birth date of George Washington; which has greatly interested me and doubtless will also be of interest to you when considering the matter of this in connection with our celebrating the birthday of Mr. Edison.

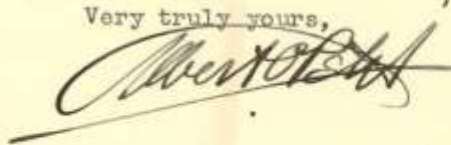
It has occurred to me that it might be well to look somewhat into the future from a historical viewpoint as to the significance of simultaneously honoring the date of birth of George Washington, our first President, and Thomas A. Edison our greatest inventor.

Without the Edison inventions we would not now have our other great inventions, mainly they all seem to be derived from vibration, and that is probably the fundamental basis of all the greatest inventions of our time.

I feel that we, as Pioneers, should do all we can to have this matter of February 11th followed up as closely as possible along the lines of combining the honoring of two of our greatest men. The Pioneers will have done a very great work were they to bring this to pass.

With the hope and pleasure of meeting you next Friday, I am, as ever,

Very truly yours,



Cable Address "Edison, New York"

*From the Laboratory
of
Thomas A. Edison,
Orange, N.J.*

December
fifth
1930

To His Holiness, Pope Pius XI,
Bishop of Rome and
Vicar of Jesus Christ.

Your Holiness:

The art of written communication has come down thru the ages from rude rock carvings to its apex, reached in the combination of devices for recording the human voice and for reproducing it at will in order to reduce the utterances to writing.

The inventor of these devices, Thomas Alva Edison, has combined them into a practical combination for voicewriting called the Ediphone and it is his desire to have the privilege of respectfully tendering to Your Holiness a complete set of this practical and simple apparatus.

With assurances of esteem,

Yours respectfully,

—Thomas A. Edison—

Ediphoned-C

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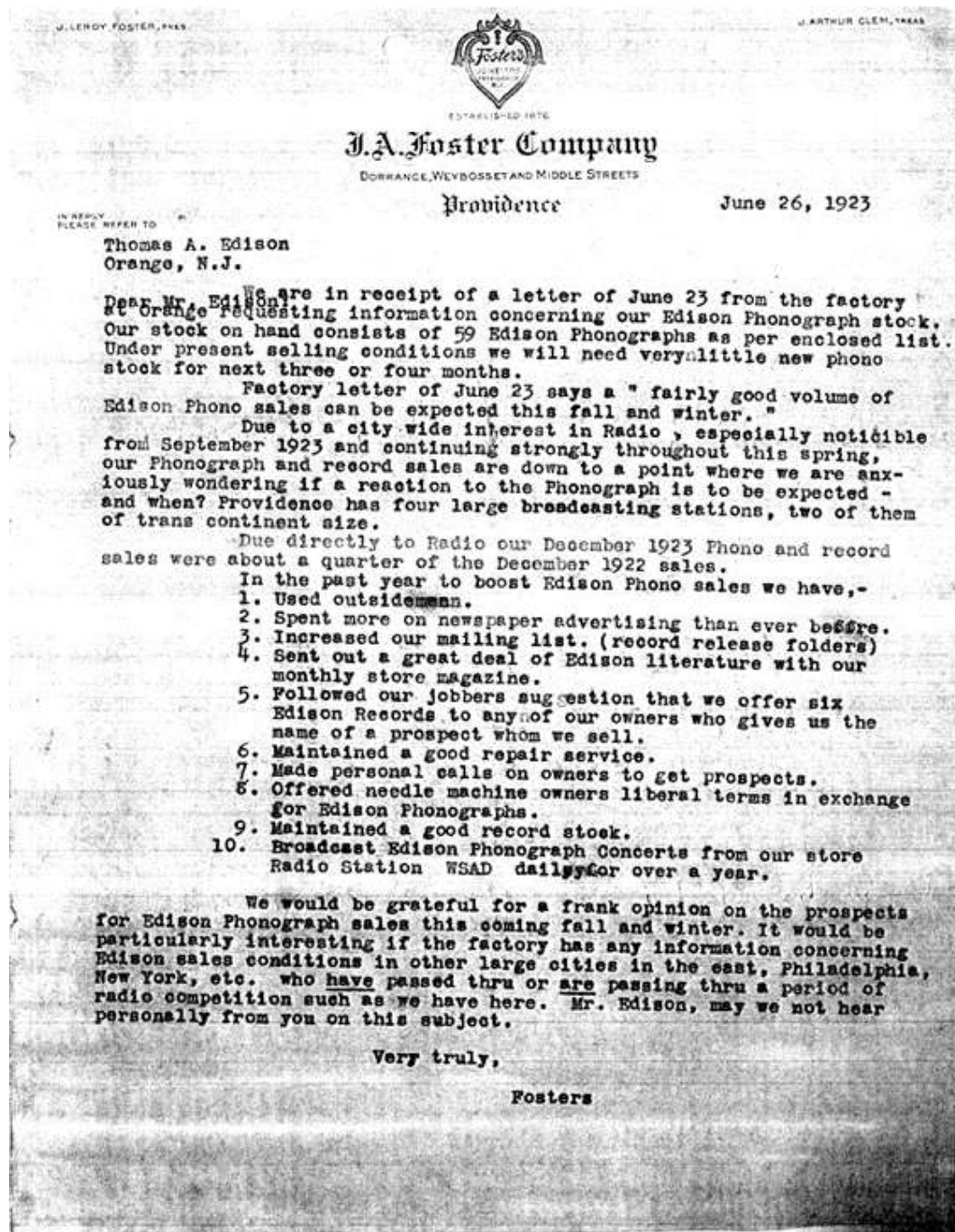
Courtesy Thomas Edison National Historical Park.



Courtesy Thomas Edison National Historical Park.



Courtesy Thomas Edison National Historical Park.



"Letter from Foster (J.A.) Co to Thomas Alva Edison, June 26th, 1924," Edison Papers Digital Edition, accessed August 6, 2018, <http://edison.rutgers.edu/digital/document/X504B>.

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Chautauqua, N.Y.
July 3, 1930

Mrs Thomas A. Edison,
Llewellyn Park.
West Orange, N.J.

My dear Mrs Edison:

Miss Smith has sent me your radio talk which you are to deliver over WJZ and associated stations on Monday at 5 o'clock. We are planning to receive this and broadcast it in the Amphitheater. We do deeply appreciate your willingness to perform this important service.

I understand that a representative of the Paramount News Reel Company is planning to be at the broadcasting station on Monday prepared to make a few pictures and then these are to be shown in all of the motion picture theatres in the country. Of course, no publicity could be more valuable to us at the beginning of our season.

I know that you will be willing to say a few words and allow them to take a picture. I have taken the liberty of drawing up a few sentences which from our point of view would be most worth while. Of course, you will change these in any way you think wise. I have formulated them to make it as easy as possible for you and also to indicate the sort of things which would be most helpful to Chautauqua.

Cordially yours,

Arthur E. Bestor

File

November 12, 1925

Thomas A. Edison
Edison Laboratories
Orange, N.J.

Dear Mr. Edison:

We have seen so many phonograph articles in various newspapers recently that it is hard to tell "propaganda" from worthwhile facts. The inclosed clipping is one of several that we found interesting, - if nothing more.

Some of the articles refer to the Victor etc. directly while others are just as applicable to the Edison, if one chooses to read them that way. We are anxious to know if any of various articles on phonographs recently read by us, (which do not mention makes by name) reflect to coming of Edison models, now in cabinet design or new and improved in reproduction methods.

We have quite a few repossessed Edisons which it would be wise for us to make greater sacrifices on at one if anything new in the Edison line is coming out shortly that would depreciate value of present models.

It may be interesting to you to have our own impressions of the new Victor Orthophonic models. Their new cabinets seem good and are apparently modeled after some of the new radio cabinet designs to please the current trend of public taste. Our contact with many of our own Edison owners, and others with whom we have talked reflects a very favorable public opinion of the new Victor production. Practically all agree that they think it a marked improvement over previous Victor reproduction.

My own personal opinion is that the only radical Victor change is a huge increase in volume which they are 'selling' (and rather successfully) to the public as a great innovation in reproduction methods. Needless to say, I do not believe that any method of amplification can deliver tone perfection that is not given to it by the reproducer itself. This we personally do not believe has been accomplished.

May we not hear from you if there are any new things to be expected shortly in the Edison line, - providing that the release of such information would at present be agreeable to you.

Very sincerely,

J.A. Foster Co.

Heald

"Letter from Foster (J.A.) Co, Pusey Bancroft Heald to Thomas Alva Edison, November 12th, 1925," Edison Papers Digital Edition, accessed August 6, 2018, <http://edison.rutgers.edu/digital/document/X504E>.

Call Address "Edison, New York"

*From the Laboratory
Thomas A. Edison,
Orange, N.J.*

August 29, 1924.

I. A. Foster Company,
Dorrance, Weybosset & Middle Streets,
Providence, R. I.

Attention, Mr. P. B. Heald.

Dear Mr. Heald:

Your letter of August 15th at hand. At present time phonographs in large cities in the East cannot be sold to any extent except by planting them in homes, not in the homes of rich people, but in the homes of those in moderate circumstances. The profit will be doubtful just now, but when the same scheme is tried in the country with a good canvasser, the results are still good and profits fair. If the dealer has four or five sub-dealers in small towns of one hundred to five hundred people, to advertise and produce prospects for the canvasser, the results in New England are excellent and profits good even now.

This plan is being worked by several dealers in New England. The factory rents the machines and records to the dealer at \$4.00 per month for each sub-dealer. The sub-dealer had no expenses, but if a prospect sent to the dealer results in the canvasser making a sale, the sub-dealer gets about 10% commission on the list price. There is no resistance against introduction of this, among dealers or sub-dealers. Dealers who have Hepplewhite or Sheraton machines themselves need not rent them from us, if they desire to use them. Only the records need be rented. We only introduce this system among dealers who canvass by truck.

Yours very truly,

Thomas A. Edison

TAE:JRO



“The Decadence of the Wizard of Menlo Park. – From the Phonograph to Polyform,”
Puck Magazine Centerfold; Vol. VI No. 155, May 5, 1880

Edison and Pop Culture: Activities

Have students choose one of the documents and answer the following questions:

Historical Context:

1. What was going on when the author created the document? How does this information assist in better understanding the document?

Intended Audience:

2. Identify the person or group the author expects to inform or influence. How might this affect the reliability or accuracy of the source?

Point of View:

3. Who is the author and what is their main idea? How does the author's background impact their written perspective? (Race, class, gender, age, religion, occupation, nationality).

Purpose:

4. What was the author trying to accomplish when creating this document? Did they have ulterior motives than what is at face value? (Persuade, establish, Expose, Discredit, Justify, etc.)

Overview:

5. What does the document actually say or reveal? BRIEFLY summarize the key and relevant information from the source.

Steve Santucci has been teaching High School History and Social Studies for the past 20 years, concentrating on both US I & II, as well as World and European History (on the Advanced Placement level). He has also taught electives in Economics, American Government, and politics and sociology. Mr. Santucci currently works at West Morris Mendham High School. His co-presenter, when sharing this work at the 2018 NJ History Forum, was Jonathan Dowler. Mr. Dowler has for the past 5 years taught Advanced Placement History United States History and World History at West Morris Mendham High School.